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PHUM
SUBJECT: KOSOVO MISSING PERSONS: OMPF REQUESTS USG FUNDING
FOR TECHNICAL STAFF

REF: A. PRISTINA 782

[1](#)B. PRISTINA 608

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY.

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. UNMIK's Office of Missing Persons and Forensics (OMPF) has asked the USG to pay the salaries up to three forensic specialists to assist with ongoing exhumations, autopsies and identifications of war victims. OMPF is very concerned about the lack of local capacity to carry out certain highly technical but crucial activities, and is worried that the upcoming transition of its competencies to local authorities will further slow the resolution of 2,150 outstanding cases of missing persons. Donor funding for forensic specialists would ensure that OMPF has the human resources it needs to continue its work over the next year. Some 100,000 euros would address these needs, albeit not in a sustainable fashion over the longer term.
END SUMMARY.

OMPF HAS NEW LABS BUT NEEDS COMPETENT STAFF

[1](#)2. (U) Despite a slowdown in leads over the past year (Ref A), UNMIK's Office of Missing Persons and Forensics (OMPF) continues its efforts to find, exhume, examine, identify and repatriate the remains of Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb victims from the 1998/1999 conflict (Ref B). According to a December 7 press release, OMPF has returned 371 sets of remains to families to date in 2006, while 2,150 persons (out of 5,206 reported) remain missing. In recognition of its efforts, UN Headquarters in New York selected OMPF as the winner of one of 17 "UN 21 Awards" for field-based projects that "improve the effectiveness of UN programs and services."

[1](#)3. (SBU) During a November 29 tour of OMPF's new morgue facility in Pristina, Acting OMPF Director Valerie Brasey described the tremendous difficulties OMPF faces in trying to

obtain and keep qualified staff. She said that out of several local lab assistants that OMPF has trained, only one has stayed with OMPF and can operate the new toxicology and histology labs full of modern equipment donated by the Swiss government.

¶4. (SBU) In order for OMPF to continue its work finding and identifying war crimes victims, Brasey said that OMPF needs the services of several highly trained professionals with skills that simply do not exist in Kosovo (or in many countries), such as forensic anthropologists, forensic archeologists and forensic photographers. She said that a forensic anthropologist, for example, needs advanced graduate studies and years of experience, and OMPF cannot wait for local capacity to be developed in this field.

OMPF ASKS USG TO PAY SALARIES FOR SPECIALISTS

¶5. (SBU) In light of the current staffing shortages, Brasey asked if the USG would consider directly paying the salaries of 1-3 international forensics specialists. She voiced specific concerns about the possible merger of OMPF with the Kosovo Forensics Institute, and worried that OMPF's ability to carry out its work could be negatively impacted because of the lack of competent staff at the institute. She maintained that it was crucial OMPF keep these positions filled with international professionals during the upcoming transition period. Brasey added that if the USG can fund the forensic specialists, then the recent 200,000 euro donation from the UK could be used to train local staff and build capacity.

¶6. (SBU) Brasey said that OMPF's most pressing need is for a forensic anthropologist, at a salary of 125 euros per day (3750 euros per month) for ten months (February to November

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2007). OMPF's former forensic anthropologist, Oran Finegan, recently left Kosovo, in part due to ongoing uncertainty over the extension of his contract. According to the OMPF terms of reference, the forensic anthropologist is needed to conduct examinations and autopsies of exhumed war victims, and assist the pathologist to determine the cause of death and complete autopsy reports. The forensic anthropologist also assists with the training of mortuary staff and identification officers. Brasey said that they have a candidate in mind -- Alan Robinson from the Guatemalan Forensic Team.

¶7. (SBU) Brasey said that their next priority is for short-term funding for an OMPF forensic photographer. She said that the UN is in the process of converting this existing position to a UN contract, but until that goes through they have run out of funding. The position is held by Alain Wittman, who has worked for OMPF since 2002 and been paid out of donor funding. According to Brasey, OMPF will also need funding for a forensic archeologist during next year's nine-month "exhumation season" (from March - November) at a rate of 125 euros per day. She said that their candidate is Juan-Carlo Tello Vidal, of the Peruvian Forensic team.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT. The OMPF request came as a surprise, since during an October visit by EUR/ACE, Brasey told us that OMPF did not need any more financial assistance for exhumations. However, OMPF has a four-year history of using USG funding effectively and responsibly. USG funding for forensic specialists over the next year will allow OMPF to use funds from other donors to train local staff and build local capacity, which will be especially crucial if the merger of OMPF with the forensics institute goes ahead as proposed. END COMMENT.

¶9. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
KAIDANOW